

A Unified Bosnian Army en route to Join NATO: From the Perspective of a Security Community

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Abstract

When the war in Bosnia ended in December 1995 with the Dayton Agreement the armed forces in the country were divided along ethnic lines. However, in 2005 the country's politicians agreed on defence reforms that led to merging former rival armed forces into a unified army of BiH as a condition for Bosnia to join NATO. Thus, today unified BiH army is making small but significant contributions towards security maintenance, both at national and global level. In order to explain the efforts of Bosnian politicians to bring the country into the Euro-Atlantic structures and send their troops into multi-national missions we have used security community theory coined by Karl Deutsch. Thus, NATO-related reforms have strengthened security and peace-building attempts among the former warring ethnic groups. Also, country's participation in multi-national peace missions abroad has been crucial commitment to the world security and peace. Therefore, today, as a NATO aspirant, Bosnia has practically become the country that exports security.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian Army, NATO, Euro-Atlantic integration, Peace-building, Security, Multi-national peace operations.

From Three Armed Forces to Unified State Army

In the early 1990s the whole world was shocked as bloody conflicts broke up in the former Yugoslavia, firstly in Slovenia and Croatia and then in 1992 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter, Bosnia or BiH) in 1992-1995 the three ethnic groups in the country fought each other supported by predominantly ethnically-populated armed forces. Although a horrible three-year war came to an end in December 1995 with signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), the separate armed forces continued to exist functioning in a previous form gathering the young people from the ethnic groups respectively. In fact, DPA established the Constitution of BiH that supposes division of the country into two Entities: the Bosniak/Croat Federation of BiH (led by the Bosniaks and Croats), and the Republika Srpska that is governed by the Serbs (Soberg, 2008). In the same manner, military stayed divided along ethnic lines.

In the Dayton Agreement, defence issues are not expressly presented as a function of the state (Perry, 2003). Thus, it has created separate armed forces, Bosniak-Croat, Army of the Federation of BiH and the Bosnian Serb, Army of Republika Srpska. After Dayton separate armed forces cooperated in the country, which spread their ethnic objectives from the previous war but now only through a different means. Put simply, separate ethnic armies had further increased an existing process of ethno-nationalization and ethnic distrust playing disintegrative role within the society rather than integrating war-torn communities through educative and training programs. That is, predominantly ethnic-populated armed forces had played a considerable political role in the process of indoctrination of their ethnic population within the country. The existence of mono-ethnic armed forces in the country both prevented integration of ethnic groups inside and country's integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations.

However, as the country strives to carry out Euro-Atlantic reforms, the idea of a common state armed force slowly has come to fore. Thus, in September 2003 the representatives from all three ethnic groups have agreed to establish a state defence ministry and a unified military command (Hawton, 2003). Further on, in December 2004, strong pressure from the international community resulted in the formation of an independent commission for defence reform which called for a set-up of a single armed force at state level. In fact, forming a single army was put as a condition for Bosnia to join NATO. In 2005 the Bosnian politicians agreed to reform the defence and

security sectors that will eventually merge the formerly rival armed forces into an integrated and unified army. As a result, today unified BiH armed force is comprised of soldiers from all ethnic groups and is making small but remarkable contributions towards security and peace-building both at national and global level.

Building a Global Peace

In order to explain the increasing efforts of the countries from the Western Balkans (WB) and especially Bosnia and Herzegovina to enter the Euro-Atlantic structures and send their troops into multi-national missions we refer to the so-called security community theory. The concept of the security community was coined by Karl Deutsch and it has become popular in the literature of international relations after the end of the Cold War, as an increasing number of countries entered international organizations such as the EU, NATO, and OSCE to preserve peace and security. The concept of the security community was designated “as a contribution to the study of possible ways in which men someday might abolish war” (Deutsch, 1957, 3). Moreover, Karl Deutsch pointed out that for a pluralistic security community “the keeping of the peace among the participating units was the main political goal overshadowing all others” (Deutsch et al. 1957, 31). Thus, the idea of security community presupposes peace-building as its central principle.

Furthermore, the concept of “security community” is understood as a “group of political units whose relations exhibit dependable expectations of peaceful change, based on the compatibility of the main values relevant to the prevailing political, economic and legal institutions and practice within the constituent units” (Deutsch, 1957, 5). That means that countries by being part of a security community are united in their efforts due to their common values and norms. In fact, a security community is by nature supposed to have “shared identities, values, and meanings” (Adler and Barnett, 1998b: 31). For instance, it is shared values, identities, and meanings that unite a number of countries from the Balkans and hold them together in common efforts to preserve peace or abolish a possibility of war in the future. Therefore, collective identity establishes patterns of diffuse reciprocity manifested in the mutual responsiveness among the members of the community (Adler and Barnett 1998b, 30-33). Today, collective identity has been built among the WB states’ Euro-Atlantic integration process.

NATO as a Liberal-Democratic Organization

NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance which constitutes a system of collective defence, but its members also share and defend jointly their common values and norms. Thus, in the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty, the signatory states agree on the protection of their values, rather than just the preservation of national autonomy declaring that: "they are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law" (NATO: 1949). In addition, in 1994 the Partnership for Peace Framework Document was based on liberal values pointing out that:

"Protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights, and safeguarding of freedom, justice, and peace through democracy are shared values fundamental to the Partnership. In joining the Partnership, the member states of the North Atlantic Alliance and the other States subscribing to this Document recall that they are committed to the preservation of democratic societies, their freedom from coercion and intimidation, and the maintenance of the principles of international law." (PfP, 1994:1).

Consequently, applicant countries from the WB are supposed to make necessary reforms in line with the values and norms that the Alliance members already respect and promote. That is, after the Cold War NATO has paid special attention to the export of democratic norms to the transitioning countries. There was a great deal of literature about NATO's attempts to promote liberal-democratic norms towards Central and Eastern Europe (Schimmelfennig 1998/9; Williams & Neumann 2000). As Schimmelfennig points out: "states that share the fundamental values of an international community and adhere to its basic norms are regarded as legitimate members of the community and are entitled to join the community organizations. Consequently, we can expect NATO to admit all countries that share its collective identity and values and adhere to its constitutive norms. The faster a country adopts the community values and norms, the earlier it becomes a member" (2000: 8). Therefore, these states are in one way constructing a common identity of secure, democratic and peaceful liberal model.

Towards the NATO Membership

According to the DPA, NATO had a responsibility to enforce compliance with the military aspects of the signed Agreement hence it deployed an Implementation Force (IFOR) of nearly

60,000 troops to the country for that assignment. The NATO-led troops have played a vital part in securing peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina since their arrival in December 1995 (ICG, 2001: 1). In December 1996 IFOR was replaced with a smaller Stabilization Force (SFOR) with about 32,000 troops. As the country has become more peaceful and stable, NATO's aim was to pass responsibility for security and internal order to domestic military forces. As a result, NATO outlined a number of benchmarks to measure progress toward a self-sustaining peace in Bosnia (Kim, 2006: 1). On December 2 2004, NATO formally brought to end its Stabilization Force (SFOR) mission in BiH and handed over peace and stabilization duties to a European Union force (EUFOR).

NATO has been deeply involved in the post-war country's stabilization and peace-building and it is also committed to supporting Bosnians' aspirations to enter both EU and NATO. However, any country that aspires to NATO membership must meet two conditions, namely, an active participation in the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) program and the MAP. On 29 November 2006, the alliance, did invite Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro to join the NATO's PfP program (Majstorovic, 2007: 640). Also, NATO's foreign ministers have agreed on April 2010 to launch a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Bosnia and Herzegovina - a penultimate step for joining the military alliance. Although the MAP is not a final promise of membership and it does not commit the alliance to defend Bosnia against a military threat or affect its decision-making mechanisms it is a crucial assistance program through which NATO and its members provide guidance and support on specific political, economic, security, and legal reforms (Arbour and Clark, 2010).

NATO-reform Process brings Security and Peace

In other words, the Membership Action Plan (MAP) is of utmost importance for the process of reconciliation and peace-building attempts among the former warring population. Furthermore, Bosnian authorities are making necessary reforms to become a NATO member in the near future. However, before it is granted, the Bosnian government is expected to complete the vital question of defence property. Indeed, one of the outstanding issues, is defence property, which should be solved before the multi-ethnic state is accepted into the NATO fold (Pop, 2010). That is, the MAP that Bosnia was granted will formally begin only when the military infrastructure is registered as the property of the Bosnian state rather than

the property of the Federation of BiH or the Republika Srpska. Still, NATO officials declared that: "Bosnia has made "significant progress on reform." The alliance welcomed Bosnia's decision to destroy surplus ammunition and arms... Bosnia also succeeded in uniting its rival ethnic armies that fought each other during the 1992-95 war, no small task in a country that remains ethnically divided" (VoA, 2010).

The prospect of the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community has to a remarkable extent strengthened building lasting peace and a long-term democratic perspective among the three ethnic groups. As Joseph stresses: "by putting membership "on the table" – with a U.S.-backed target date -- NATO will change the zero-sum dynamic that has thwarted well-intentioned efforts at reform and supply the crucial leverage to produce fundamental compromise" (2009: 2). Along with the collective defence, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and cooperation through the NATO Science for Peace and Security Program the NATO membership shall make country more stable and functional. As John Kerry points out in his column, "the NATO membership has a proven record of promoting political progress across Eastern and Central Europe, and it could do the same for Bosnia-Herzegovina, too" (2009). Indeed, the reforms carried out en route to NATO membership have made Bosnia more stable and viable.

In addition, the establishment of the unified armed forces of BiH has become an important step towards strengthening the country and its government. This is also sending a positive message to NATO and EU members that they have a solid partner on the other side. As former U.S. Ambassador to BiH Douglas Meklhejni pointed out after the joint exercises of the Armed Forces and the U.S. Army: "This is just another indicator which proves that this country is strong and solid partner of NATO and of the EU member states" (Bjelajac: 2007). Simply put, NATO-related defence reforms have to a large extent transferred responsibility to the central government. Indeed, should contradictions in state and entity law arise, the state law is the final word, made clear in Article 35: "The Parliamentary Assembly shall exercise democratic parliamentary control over the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all state-level defence institutions" (Article 35: 2003).

Defence and Army at a State Level

As a result of the reforms made towards NATO integration Bosnia today has established military structure that is controlled by civilian government as is the case in any democratic country. A new Law on Defence was adopted in December 2003 which reinforced state defence structure. That is, its enactment and supporting legislative action at state and entity levels eventually enabled the formation of a single state-level defence establishment, with a clear chain of command emanating from the state down to the entities, reinforcing the supremacy of the state for defence matters (Perdan, 2008: 256). Furthermore, the Law on Defence made the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina responsible for the protection of country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Also, the Ministry of Defence of BiH was founded in 2004 as a central state body that is in charge of the unified Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, the country today has just one defence minister, one chief of staff, one chain of command and one army (Perdan, 2008: 257).

Indeed, the NATO-led defence reforms have produced remarkable results, helping Bosnia to create an integrated military that is a model for building effective state institutions and a credible partner to NATO (Kerry, 2009). That is, Bosnia has established a unified armed force in which people from all three ethnic groups are working on joint missions and defence programs. For the first time in the post war period the soldiers of the Bosnian army wear the same uniform with state insignia, they swear the same oath and serve under the same country flag. In addition, by forming a single army the country has made significant steps towards demilitarization so that the conflict that broke out in the 1990s never repeats. As Cerkez-Robinson from the USA Today points out: "Now, the three former antagonists -- a Muslim Bosniak, a Roman Catholic Croat and a Christian Orthodox Serb -- are training together as they prepare for voluntary duty in other crisis areas around the world" (2008).

Local Ramifications of NATO Prospects

NATO membership is perceived among the countries from the region as a good way to become a part of democratic and open western communities. That is, in the region NATO membership is viewed as a major strategic choice that would bring national leaderships and their respective societies closer to Euro-Atlantic integration (EKEM, 2010: 4). Although all the countries from the WB are in one way or another integrating themselves into NATO

structures each of them is at a different stage on this road. Albania and Croatia entered NATO in 2009 and Macedonia is the closest member from the region if it resolves the name dispute with Greece that hinders its integration into NATO for the time being. The remaining countries from the Balkans have made significant progress but are still far from the NATO membership because of their internal problems. That is why the membership of these countries will directly contribute to the enforcement of democracy, peace, stability, market economy and the rule of law in the region (IDM, 2008: 7).

Furthermore, formation and successful maintenance of unified armed forces in Bosnia is to a considerable extent strengthening the idea of multi-national country as a possible political model. That is, unified Bosnian army composed of soldiers from all three ethnic groups working and training together is a proof that multi-national and multi-cultural country is possible and feasible when there is enough political will to achieve necessary consensus. As the head of the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia, General William Ward declared, “I think it sends a great message... that there is a commitment, a desire to move forward and get beyond the very destructive and terrible times that were experienced here during the war” (Hawton, 2003). This is the great message that peaceful and multi-national Bosnia is a possible project. As the first commander of the Joint Command of Bosnian armed forces General Atif Dudakovic said, “The days of Ustasas, Mujahidins, Chetniks, Partisans, and the JNA had passed. This is now the new era. It is the era of unified armed forces of BiH” (Huseinovic, 2008).

Good Neighbourly Relations

Most importantly, looking from a long-term perspective integration of the region's countries into Euro-Atlantic organizations will result in peaceful, stable and secure Western Balkans. In the aftermath of bloodshed from the early 1990s this is a historic opportunity for the regional leaders to establish more permanent peace and good neighbourly relations among themselves. Thus, in 2011 WB, indeed, resemble a more peaceful and secure place than in the 1990s. This is to a large extent due to the regional states' Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and common efforts committed on this road. As president Bush emphasized at the Bucharest Summit: “Today Balkan, is a region which is growing in tolerance and peace. These changes are a result of NATO determined actions and courageous choices of Balkan leaders, who have been working for leaving behind the violence and past divisions” (IDM, 2008: 11). Indeed,

today it is almost impossible to think about the option of open war between the countries from the region.

In addition, NATO and EU integration prospects have become crucial for strong and dynamic regional cooperation among the WB countries themselves. In other words, these countries and their governments have come to realize that only by increasing regional and international cooperation (political, social, economic and security) can their strategic objective of joining the two poles of the Euro-Atlantic community be attained (Couloumbis & Ramaj, 2007: 17). The rationale behind the requirement for the WB regional cooperation as a prerequisite for both accession in NATO and the European Union is straightforward (Seroka, 2008). For that purpose the regional governments have implemented reforms such as closer cooperation with neighbours and multi-dimensional cooperation. Through its elaborated structures and effective missions, NATO has become a key player in shaping cooperative security in the post-Cold War Europe (Sanader, 2005). It would not be exaggeration to say that without Euro-Atlantic perspective the region would be one big 'powder barrel' of Europe.

A large numbers of senior officers in the WB militaries have obtained education in NATO and PfP facilities, and defence strategies have been adapted to integrate with NATO and ESDP strategic plans (Seroka, 2008). For instance, the Adriatic Charter has been an effective instrument that has proved the practical usefulness of the regional cooperation of some of the WB states. The Adriatic Charter is an association formed and signed in May 2003 by Albania, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia and USA to help their NATO efforts. BiH and Montenegro joined it in December 2008. As Grdesic points out: "the Charter has opened up many political, military, security and economic possibilities. Meetings, talks and contacts of the political elites of the three countries have enabled prejudices to be overcome and the trust built" (2004: 120). Thus, if this trend of peaceful coexistence and increasing cooperation is sustained, the Kantian peace proposition will be successfully confirmed (Couloumbis & Ramaj, 2007).

Bosnian Troops in Multi-national Missions

In addition the NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme, which Bosnia joined in December 2006, includes the practical cooperation with the applicants for membership. Thus, Serbs,

Croats and Muslims who completed training for the first army unit bringing together Bosnia's warring factions of 10 years ago left for the Middle East yesterday to join U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq (Dervisbegovic, 2005). To be precise, Bosnia and Herzegovina deployed in June 2005 a contingent of 36 troops specialized in mine-removal activities to the Diwaniyah area in southern Iraq. A Bosnian unit had the duty to deal with unexploded ordnance and ammunition (Hawton, 2005). The unit is Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit and was subordinated to a US Marine Engineer unit in the Fallujah area. Bosnian contingent were set to rotate to Iraq for a period of six-months each. Additionally, in August 2008 a 49-man infantry unit was deployed to Baghdad to guard the U.S. Military Camp Victory (Reuters, 2008).

Furthermore, in 2009 Bosnia sent its troops to Afghanistan to join the NATO-led mission ISAF. In light of this, a small contingent of Bosnian soldiers has been deployed to Helmand Province to serve as part of the Danish Contingent providing security for their base in Gereshk (Plante: 2011). The country sent in total 10 officers to serve within ISAF. Although its number is modest, a deployment of the Bosnian troops to Afghanistan is one of the major steps forward in the country's road to become a NATO member in the future. In addition, participation in a multi-national mission in Afghanistan is vital to contribute to certain extent to international security and peace-building in the world. As NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer emphasized "NATO's success in the peacekeeping and peace enforcement operation in Afghanistan is the alliance's number one priority" (Hendrickson and Smith, 2006: 302).

Importance of Multi-national Peace Missions

From its foundation in 1949 until the early 1990s, the central purpose of NATO was to provide a collective defence to its members. The end of the Cold War left NATO with an identity crisis of sorts: what was it, should it continue as an alliance, and if so to what purpose and under what circumstances? (Michta, 2001: 1). Following newly emerged conflicts in the world, NATO has launched a number of the so-called peace support operations. That is, NATO has formulated a doctrine on PSOs: "PSOs [...] involve military forces, diplomatic and humanitarian agencies [...] and may include Peace Enforcement and Peacekeeping as well as Conflict Prevention, Peacemaking, Peace Building and Humanitarian Relief" (NATO, 2001: xi). According to NATO, PSOs may also include peace enforcement missions that "aim

to re-establish peace” (Non-article, 2005). So far, NATO has launched PSOs in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Afghanistan and in a support role in Iraq. Multinational operations hold many benefits over unilateral actions (Dijkstra, 2010: 1). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Bosnia has been participating in a number of the peace missions.

An active participation in abroad multi-national missions has been of crucial importance, as the country fulfilled its main obligations on the road towards NATO integration. After the hard work on NATO related reform process Bosnia has practically become the country that exports security. In other words, Bosnian government has to a significant extent improved the image of the country that once was highly dependent on foreign security intervention into the one that has developed armed forces which have a capacity and common will to contribute to international security. As Thomas Moffatt, U.S. European Command security assistance officer in Sarajevo points out: “It is still a place that needs assistance from the international community for stability and reconstruction ... But, I think they are moving from a position as a security consumer to security provider. It demonstrates to the international community that Bosnia and Herzegovina can step up and help in some way” (Emert, 2005).

Also it is of crucial importance for young democratic country such as Bosnia to be approaching NATO as the world's most successful organization dealing with world security. In this light, participation in missions abroad under the umbrella of NATO or the European Union in order to contribute to stability and peace in the world has been one of the most important preconditions for Bosnia. With deploying its troops in missions Bosnia is slowly entering the family of peaceful and democratic countries which, as a rule of the game, do not wage war against each other. In fact, keeping democratic peace among them has become one of the most remarkable achievements of the Alliance. Simply put, the key of NATO's success lays in common values shared by its members such as democracy, freedom, rule of law, free market economy etc. (IDM, 2008: 7). Thus, integrating into NATO through foreign multi-national missions will strengthen the peace in the world and in Bosnia.

Concluding Remarks

During the war in Bosnia (1992-1995) the three ethnic groups in the country fought each other with predominantly ethnically-populated armed forces. Although the war came to an end in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Agreement the armies in the country were divided along ethnic lines creating separate armed forces. Such predominantly ethnic-populated armed forces had played considerable political role in the process of indoctrination of their ethnic population. However, as the country strives to carry out Euro-Atlantic reforms the idea of unified armed forces has slowly become a subject of discussions. Also, single state army was a condition for Bosnia to join NATO, which influenced the reform processes in the security and military sector. Thus, in 2005 the Bosnian politicians agreed to merge the former rival armies into a unified army. As a result, today unified BiH Army is comprised of soldiers from all ethnic groups and is making small but remarkable contributions towards security and peace-building both at national and global level.

Additionally, the prospect of the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community has to a significant extent brought security, stability and peace between the warring ethnic groups. Similarly, maintenance of unified armed forces of BiH has become an important step towards strengthening the country and its government. Equally important, integration of the region's countries into Euro-Atlantic organizations will result in a peaceful, stable and secure environment, providing to the regional leaders a historic opportunity to establish more permanent peace and good neighborly relations among themselves. Furthermore, after establishing unified armed forces Bosnia has deployed its troops to a number of multi-national peace operations. Taking part in the multi-national missions has been of crucial importance as the country prepares for integration into NATO. Most importantly, after the hard work on the NATO-related reform process Bosnia has practically become the country that exports security. This is important message for the world peace, indeed.

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